

# Save the Last Word for Me

## Description

To become thoughtful, responsive readers, students need to be encouraged to think about more than finding answers to questions or commenting on characters or plot. Save the Last Word for Me is an excellent strategy for developing active and reflective readers by eliciting responses to specific quotations or passages from literature. The small group setting gives students an opportunity to interact meaningfully about a selection or a full-length work as they learn how to respond thoughtfully and completely and to justify their responses. In addition to encouraging those who may be reluctant to speak in front of the full class, the format also gives students time to rehearse their comments by writing them first.

## Steps

1. This strategy works well with selections that are rich and potentially interesting to students. Prepare students to read by establishing background knowledge and clarifying vocabulary in your prereading activities. If working with a full-length book, you might apply this strategy to chapters or use it when students have completed the entire work.
2. Have students read the assigned work independently. Instruct them to note three to five statements or ideas that catch their attention as they read. These may be ideas with which they agree or disagree, that they find amusing, surprising, or intriguing, that reveal something about a character or an event in a story, or that are powerfully or eloquently stated. Provide students with sticky notes to mark these ideas.
3. After students have finished reading, give them copies of the Save the Last Word for Me response page. Tell students to go back and copy the statements that caught their attention onto this response sheet in the left column in the boxes above the dotted line. Then, have them paraphrase each statement they quoted—put it in their own words—in the boxes under the dotted line.

If some students need more instruction or support on paraphrasing, provide a paraphrasing prompt, such as “I think this means \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.”

4. After students have paraphrased each quotation, ask them to react to each. Students can begin by writing one sentence stating their reaction to it. Then students should write two or three sentences explaining or justifying the reaction. Modeling the technique for students at this point is important.

For students who need more modeling of responding, you could read aloud several paragraphs from the story and note every time an idea strikes you. Model how to respond: agree, disagree, find interesting or surprising, share a personal experience, or relate to something else. Always explain or justify your reaction.

## General Resources

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5. After students have written their responses, they gather in groups of three or four. The first student reads one of his or her quotations aloud along with the paraphrase, but not the reaction. The other group members respond to and discuss the quotation. When the other students have responded, the original student then reads his or her reaction, thus having the last word on the quotation. Then, the next person in the group reads his or her quotation and paraphrase, and the procedure continues as before until each person in the group has shared a statement and had the last word on it. You may then continue with another round of statements.
6. When students have finished, bring the class together to debrief. Did writing down ideas make students read more carefully and thoughtfully? Did their group members' responses make them think about their quotations in a different way? What ideas did they hear that were particularly interesting or surprising?
7. As an alternative to the Save the Last Word for Me Response Page, students may use index cards or paper folded in half, one card or sheet per statement.

## Sources

Buehl, D. (2001). *Classroom Strategies for Interactive Learning*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Vaughan, J., and Estes, T. (1986). *Reading and Reasoning Beyond the Primary Grades*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.